

How to Read Your DXA Report

A plain-language guide to the words and numbers on a bone density report.

Educational only: This sheet is for visit preparation. It is not a diagnosis, treatment plan, or substitute for care from your own clinician.

Key terms

Term	What it means
BMD	Bone mineral density, usually reported as g/cm ² .
T-score	Comparison with a young-adult reference population. Used for many adults age 50 and older.
Z-score	Comparison with an age-matched reference population. Often more useful in younger adults.
Site measured	Lumbar spine, femoral neck, total hip, or sometimes one-third radius.
Least significant change	The smallest change likely to be real rather than measurement noise.

Questions to ask

- Which site had the lowest valid score?
- Were any vertebrae excluded because of arthritis, fracture, or artifact?
- Should this result be interpreted with a T-score or Z-score?
- Does my fracture history change what this DXA means?
- If this is a repeat DXA, did the change exceed least significant change?

Remember

A DXA report is a map, not a verdict. It helps organize risk, but it does not replace the full clinical story.

References

Blake GM, Fogelman I. The role of DXA bone density scans in the diagnosis and treatment of osteoporosis. *Postgrad Med J*. 2007;83(982):509-517. PMID: 17675543.

Krueger D, Tanner SB, Szalat A, et al. DXA Reporting Updates: 2023 Official Positions of the International Society for Clinical Densitometry. *J Clin Densitom*. 2024;27(1):101437. PMID: 38011777.

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